

An Interactive Game for Teaching about Bird Collisions with Towers

Build a Better Tower

Prepare: Read “Guide to Communications Towers and Birds” (available online in IMBD Press Kit in “Additional Resources” section of www.birdday.org) and the IMBD Collisions magazine, available in the 2005 Catalog of Products (also at www.birdday.org).

Materials You Need:

- Several stackable items (for example, little mesh desk organizer units from The Container Store; anything that is stackable and can have strings or wire attached to it will work)
- Flashlight or other small light (having both a red one and a white one is best)
- String or wire (for modeling guy wires)
- Pictures of towers (download from the website, cut from magazines, or take your own)

Running the Activity

1. Show participants a picture of a very tall, lighted tower that has guy wires for support. Explain the purpose of the tower, and have them build a model that is as close as possible to this picture.



2. Once the tower is done, explain that biologists have discovered that there are dangers that this tower would present to a bird that is flying near it. (You can use a stuffed toy bird to demonstrate if you would like to). Be sure to mention the guy wires (birds crash into them), the steady light source (which draws birds in and confuses them, especially if it is red), and the height of the tower (taller towers are more dangerous for birds, as they are usually lit and supported by wires).



3. Have them modify the tower they built based on what they have learned. Be sure they take away the wires, which may mean they want to restructure the building to have a different support system (three or four legs instead of one). The light can be either removed, or just “modified” (explain that a white strobe/intermittent light would be less attractive for birds). Towers should be made shorter as well.

4. Show them different pictures, with towers that are safer for birds. Have them compare their building to the one they see in the picture.

Taking It a Step Further.....

If you have the time and resources, another issue that you can address is the siting of towers (where new towers are built in relation to birds and their flight). One easy way to do this: get a large piece of foam board, and color/glue construction paper on to designate areas of land (urban) and water (coastline, wetland areas). Have your participants build their tower wherever they want to the first time, without any instruction from you. If they build it in a developed area, great! If they build their tower anywhere near a wetland area, be sure you address this when you ask them to rebuild a better, safer tower.

The US Fish and Wildlife Guidelines for tower siting recommend building new towers within existing tower clusters ("antenna farms"), and away from wetlands and other known bird concentration areas, such as state or federal refuges. While you won't know where birds migrate along your "map", you can explain that wetlands/coastlines should definitely be off-limits!

If you have enough time and materials, you can also bring up the issue of co-location, which is the practice of building new antennas on pre-existing structures rather than building a whole new tower. Once their "better" tower is complete, have them build another just like it. The show a picture of a building with several different groups of antennas on it; you may want to ask them if they can figure out what the companies did before you tell them. Then see if they can just attach new "antennas" to one tower and take the second one down. You might also want to talk about "creative" co-locations on other tall structures (water towers and signs).

